

## Introducing Renew Network



*By Bobby Harrington and Jason Henderson*

Renew Network is being launched to help church leaders and everyday disciples to renew Biblical Christianity and Jesus-style disciple making. The hope and prayer is that Renew.org will become the hub for a network of millions of disciples of Jesus. The vision is disciples making disciples among all ethnicities and nations.

When we say *network*, we do not mean a television network, but a network or web of people who are connected to each other. A church network can also be confused with a denomination. There are big differences between denominations and networks. The early church and most churches in the American Restoration Movement are examples of networks.

In the book ***The Starfish and the Spider***, Ori Bradman and Rod Beckstrom describe the difference between centralized organizations (like governments, companies, denominations) and decentralized organizations (like 12 step groups, Indian tribes, church networks). Here is a summary of the two different approaches.

### Centralized (Denominations)

Someone is in charge  
There are headquarters  
Centralized power structure  
Knowledge is centralized  
Direction comes from the head

### Decentralized (Networks)

No one person is in charge  
There are no headquarters  
Decentralized power structure  
Knowledge is decentralized  
Direction comes from the network

As with any broad characterizations, there are wide variations among both denominations and networks. Not all networks are completely decentralized nor are all denominations completely centralized.

There is one thing about a network to note upfront - people can be in multiple networks at the same time. Think of a Nascar racing car: it has multiple stickers and connections to various sponsors. They are not in competition. They all work together and the collaboration helps the driver. That is how various networks can collaborate to help church leaders and individual disciples.

Most people connected to Renew will maintain their other network relationships. Some will remain connected within Independent Christian Churches; some to networks among Churches of Christ; some to International Churches of Christ. And some will remain connected to other fellowships and groups that have no historic ties to the Restoration Movement but share the same beliefs and commitment to disciple making.

The leaders of Renew will encourage people to maintain their connections to other networks in addition to Renew.

Bobby Harrington is the new executive director of Renew Network. More than a decade ago, with the input of people like Alan Hirsch, Dave Ferguson, Todd Wilson (national church planting leaders working with Exponential) he helped Stadia (a Restoration Movement church planting organization) develop a national network. Then in 2011 he helped established the Relational Discipleship Network with Jim Putman from Real Life Ministries in Post Falls, Idaho (to help churches make the organizational shift to a discipleship focus). And then, in 2014, with the help of Exponential's Todd Wilson, he founded discipleship.org, a national network of 20+ disciple making networks. Through all of these experiences, Bobby is convinced that a solid theological foundation for disciple making and church planting is necessary. So he will be working with the leaders of these three branches of the Restoration Movement to renew the best of Restoration Movement theology with a focus on Jesus-style Disciple Making.<sup>1</sup>

There are 7 key organizing principles that they have identified in high functioning networks. They believe that each of these principles, applied prayerfully and with diligence, will work together to create an effective network.

### **1. Influential leaders have compelling beliefs, convictions, and a vision for God's church.**

Networks are started by influential leaders with a broad reach. Think of people like Alexander Campbell, John Wesley, or, in our time, Shedonkaih Johnson (in Sierra Leone). These are visionary men, strong, bold and full of faith. They are essential for large-scale networks. These leaders form a team of leaders, and together, they inspire and draw followers. National leaders are the primary vision casters of the movement. You can find out about the Renew Leaders speaking at church leaders launch October 24<sup>th</sup> by going to [renew.org](http://renew.org)

### **2. Influential leaders join together and articulate their beliefs, convictions, and vision as the DNA of the Network.**

National leaders create or synthesize DNA. Then each network is built around that specific DNA. A prime sign of a true network leader is their strong sense that what they believe is right, uniquely right, and life changing - and that it must be propagated or spread to others. For a network, the DNA becomes the most fundamental building block. Relational circles are then built around the DNA. Again, for Renew, it is Biblical Christianity and Jesus-style disciple making (articulated in Renew leadership documents).

### **3. An expanding number of people build shared relational connections around the DNA of the Network.**

Everyone in the network shares life and resources. No one ministers alone. The sharing (which is true *koinonia*) involves the sharing of money, training, personal support, cutting edge resources and general kingdom-life. Without relationships, networks cannot function. By relationships, networks thrive. Renew will seek to catalyze both macro (large scale) and micro (small scale) relationships coming out of their church leaders launch on October 24<sup>th</sup>.

#### **4. Network members focus on the mission of spreading the DNA through word and deed.**

The sense of God's mission drives the network. The truths of the kingdom, the gospel and Jesus show us that the stakes could not be higher. Making disciples and renewing and planting churches is the ultimate mission. It is reflected in service and love to all people. Jesus' kingdom is the best thing any person can ever enter into and Renew wants to give everyone in the world a chance to join.

#### **5. Networks come together at national (macro) and local (micro) levels.**

Large Networks have both a national and a local presence. People want to be a part of something grand, national, even international. Coming together at least once a year in a big group is desirable. It is a craving for an annual pilgrimages, like the ancient Israelites coming to Jerusalem for Pentecost. The network focus, however, is decentralized and concentrates on local micro-networks. Spiritual Renewal requires a high level of personal and relational support and a network is ideally suited to provide it. At Renew's national leadership gathering they will introduce people to a limited number of micro networks. In the future they hope that they can expand to many church leaders.

#### **6. Coaches guide the local (micro) networks.**

The real life change that happens in networks typically occurs at a local or personal level. It is in face-to-face gatherings where people know each other by name. Network coaches provide support and guidance for the smaller group. These "catalysts" provide guidance for fellow church leaders. Renew coaches will help the church leaders in their micro groups to integrate the principles of Biblical Christianity and Disciple making into their personal lives and ministries.

#### **7. The network thrives by using leading edge communication tools.**

Communication was greatly enhanced by Roman roads in the first century and by Gutenberg's printing press in the 1400s. Advances in communication technology continue. People can instantly read posts that friends who are miles away posted just a few minutes ago. Church leaders can see one another face-to-face and talk through problems on the internet, even though they are in different states and countries. The internet is here to stay. Print publications are dying - websites, social media, and online

videos are thriving. Renew will seek to utilize leading edge technology through the best means possible.

You are invited to join with Renew. The vision is the same vision Jesus gave us in Revelation 7:9 - *I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb.* They look forward to the realization of this vision through the efforts of countless people in space and time, including theirs.

To learn more about Renew Network go to [renew.org](http://renew.org)

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<sup>1</sup> For those interested, these network principles are described at a more in-depth level in the book written by Bobby Harrington and Marc Bigelow called, *Together: Networks and Church Planting* (Stadia, 2011).